OUR FAITH

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Purpose:--"*To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man.*"

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U. C. F. Editorial:

Loyalty and Devotion

At the close of Anniversary Week the president of the American Unitarian Association, whose third term expires next year, sent a letter to his ministerial colleagues in which he spoke of "advancing together in the years ahead." His letter appealed for "a right spirit," for "united effort," for "common loyalty." Yet his closing sentence revealed a sad condition of spiritual bankruptcy. "Let us go forward together," he urged, "united in our devotion to the ideal of a truth that no one among us 'quite understands'!"

Devotions, loyalty, unity — these are moving words. And how much the reality they point to needs to be actualized within our denomination! But when such moving words are not conjoined with a common acceptance of apprehended truth, what are they but empty rhetoric? Men do not rally themselves in wholehearted devotion to a pallid abstraction. Nor has any psychology found it possible to combine a genuine fervor with a halting mind. The standard Dr. Eliot has raised as a rallying point would be less than adequate to hold together even a scientific society or a philosophical association. Men can only unite upon the basis of truth held in common. All true fellowship is fellowship in worship.

It would be the end of everything for us as a religious fellowship if our movement no longer stood for any definable truth, if we lost all faith in anything positively apprehended, if we could not maintain a purpose commanding our common loyalty and devotion. No religious group ever made any impact on the life of its time without sustaining its offensive in the strength of a profound faith. Being religious was never merely searching for a truth. It has always meant being so gripped by a truth that its power is irresistible.

The A.U.A. was not organized to pursue a truth "that no one quite understands." It was organized to diffuse the positive knowledge of a Christianity more pure than is commonly recognized in Christendom. This is our historic mission. This is the way of that "historic sense" which Frederic Henry Hedge rightly distinguished from the polar extremes of conservatism and radicalism. The radicalism that would divorce us from that historic mission is altogether misnamed "Unitarianism." We are wedded to history and to a tradition within which many a sure Word of God has been spoken. It is this that provides us with an adequate center of loyalty and devotion.

The Issue Before Us

THEODORE C. BYOWNE

(Chairman: "Unitarian Christian Fellowship," member of Dewey and Almy Chemical Co., Cambridge, Mass.)

No one can experience Anniversary Week, see people from far and near, witness their joy in contact, without realizing that he is a member of a great tradition.

But he must also be aware that Unitarians, as a group, are not happy; he must sense apprehension and foreboding. The

apprehension is that a great tradition is in jeopardy. The foreboding is that we may not be able to prevent it breaking down. Why, when Unitarianism has behind it a century of great thoughts and works, and has produced unparalleled personalities, must it now run down like a tired clock spring?

I think we have but to contrast the philosophy and purpose of the creative Unitarianism of yesterday with our philosophy and our purpose of today. Our fathers truly believed in the Fatherhood of God. They fought and were willing to die for the Brotherhood of Man. They preached and accepted the leadership of Jesus. They thought that a man's character was the measure of his spiritual being. They held an unswerving faith in Humanity, and believed that the destiny of mankind was to progress onward and upward forever. Then there came a change. The five principles of agreement faded away. We announced that Unitarianism henceforth was dedicated to the Free Mind Principle. We had scarcely done this when those who adopted the Principle made the not too surprising discovery that there was little in Unitarianism to be free from. What creed bound us? What doctrine hemmed us in? What hierarchy existed to proclaim what was orthodox? It even came about that some, in their dedication to the Free Mind Principle, thought of the five ancient principles of agreement, no longer as goals to be achieved, but as obstacles to the expansion of freedom in the absolute.

Today, on one page of "The Packet" God is presented as an outworn, unscientific concept. Christianity is stated to be a philosophical antiquity. And Jesus himself is presented as a minor prophet in a world full of prophecy. On the next page we find God pictured as the all-loving Father; God made the source of the moral purpose in man; Jesus held up as the peerless leader and the exemplar of the devoted life. If belief in God is a positive value, then Atheism is an equal but negative value. Their algebraic sum is zero. Of what use will be the pleas for Unity which we are hearing this week? Do we really expect our Doctors of Divinity to find some philosopher's stone to transmute these opposites into a single, dynamic faith? We cannot found a valid faith by fusing belief in God with the denial of his existence. We cannot build a vital church by combining Christian teaching with its utter rejection. We have tried and tried again. The results have been zero in the past. They will be zero in the future.

There is an old Jewish legend the moral of which is: He who would be happy must know what things are impossible. It is a profound truth, as psychologists will attest. We must recognize that even Unitarians find some things impossible. We must choose. If the choice is the Free Mind, then a mind free of what?—free to do what? For absolute freedom is vacancy. If the choice is Christian tradition and loyalty, then what part of that tradition and what center of loyalty do we support? We must have an area of agreement. We must have a common purpose. We must state it, know it and have devotion to that purpose, or we must continue to suffer the neurasthenia of the frustrated.

(Chairman's remark at the meeting of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, May 25, 1948).

"The Holy Spirit" and Unitarians

PIERRE VAN PAASSEN

(Unitarian Minister, Distinguished Author)

There may still be some amongst us who believe (albeit somewhat stealthily perhaps) in the power of the Holy Spirit, but very few, I dare say, ever think of the Holy Spirit really entering their lives.

Imagine anyone in our materialist and mechanized age confessing that God has come into his life, that he no longer lives unto himself, but that Christ, or the Spirit of God liveth in him, that it is as if an "Other" governed, counselled and led him, as if that "Other One" told him from day to day and from hour to hour, in all the vicissitudes of the workaday world, in his family and communal relationships, what to do and what not to do. If we met such a person we would probably look upon him as somewhat of an anomaly, as a freak. In certain milieus of our intellectualized, dechristianized and spiritually poverty-stricken Unitarian Fellowship, such an individual would more than likely be dismissed with that amused smile of condescending toler-

ance usually reserved for religious crackpots and enthusiasts.

For amongst us too, as with those semi-Christians whom St. Paul encountered in Ephesus, the Holy Spirit, I fear, has become an almost unknown, certainly a negligible quantity. Where, for instance, could one detect the merest spark of the prophetic fire, a gleam of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the recently published reports on the business transacted during Anniversary Week? In perusing the documentary evidence, one asks oneself in shocked amazement whether these were the deliberations of a Church, or merely the goings-on at their annual pepping-up exercises of some society of co-optimists or other. There was little or no indication, as far as I could discover, of a deeper disquietude, or even of concern over the spiritual state of America, over a whole generation of man spiritually cast adrift, over masses of our contemporaries vaguely, and in some instances frantically, searching for the source of that peace which passeth understanding.

Einstein, a Jew, o irony, had to come and remind us of the **amor Dei intellectualis,** of the God-intoxication of Spinoza!

There were, of course, the usual references to the words and deeds of our saintly precursors, the Channings, the Parkers, the Martineaus, and others. Their lives and sayings were once more held up as worthy of emulation and imitation, as noble examples to follow. But neither in Boston in 1948, nor at any other time or place since I became a Unitarian, have I ever heard or read of anyone disclosing what seems to be guarded as an almost shameful-never-to-be-communicated secret, namely this: that the power and the beauty and the blessing of the lives and works of Channing and Parker and Martineau lay precisely in the fact that they were men who walked with God, that they had received the Holy Spirit, that they were seized and driven by God, yes, that they were literally overwhelmed by Him, so that they could not do anything else but speak and act in His name! . . .

Without a daily, realistic and concrete experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world, we simply cannot speak of a fully realized Christian faith and life. Today we find ourselves, as a Church and as individuals in a distraught, collapsing world. We are in the midst of cataclysmic events. It is well that we should take stock of our human condition, of the social-economic and the political conjuncture at which man has arrived. Our duty, as Christians and as a Church, seems inescapable: we must bring our influence to bear on the course of events, by sensitzing the hearts of men, by humanizing the struggle for power, by inculcating a reverence for life, especially in a time when the drift towards war is frighteningly evident again. For we have been charged by the Author and Finisher of our faith to overcome the world, to change its ways and, if necessary, to engage in a struggle of life and death with it in order to replace it with "a new heaven and a new earth."

But how can we possibly carry out His command if, in this supreme and desperate hour, we deprive ourselves of the spiritual equipment, the weapons to fight sin and injustice and greed and hatred and obscurantism; if we have not what Channing and Parker and Martineau had: the prophetic fire, the Holy Spirit, the courage to be, not merely streamlined in a streamlined age, but to be prophetic and to be unpopular?

That would mean a great advance indeed, for then we would no longer be content with a ridiculous, yes, a quite ridiculous minimum-Christianity, but at last, with a broken heart, appeal for ourselves and for our Church to the full riches of God, to His Holy Spirit, Who wants to reveal Himself luminous and Mighty, even in the dark night through which Unitarianism is passing at present.

The Christian Register

ROWLAND GRAY-SMITH
(Minister, New North Church, Hingham, Mass.)

An important decision with regard to the Christian Register was made at the 1948 Annual Meeting of the American Unitarian Association. The meeting decided that a president of the Association is not the best man to judge of what evaluations of his official acts should or should not be published.

That decision was the first step towards restoring to our press its traditional freedom. Prior to 1939 the Register was run

by a separate Corporation whose trustees were elected by the five national Unitarian organizations. That system of management and control was based on the principle of the freedom of the press from administrative control. The honors for setting it up go to a former president, Dr. Samuel A. Eliot, who disdained personal power over our press.

In 1937 the Commission of Appraisal recommended that, in the interests of free discussion, the separate Corporation be preserved; but in the year 1939, fateful throughout the world for the triumph of totalitarian patterns, it was liquidated. As a result there was for the first time attached to the office of the president the power to control the selection of news and the publication of opinions.

There has been great uneasiness in the denomination ever since. Over the oft-repeated statement that the magazine's traditional freedom was being continued, many shook their heads. And during the last few years several attempts have been made to pry away from the presidential office some of the unprecedented power it won in 1939.

At last these efforts have had a modicum of success. The 1948 Annual Meeting curbed slightly the president's new powers. It agreed that a president is not the best judge of what evaluations of his official acts should be published. It recommended the appointment of three editorial writers who, in addition to having the two editorial pages to themselves, will be constituted the sole judges of whether or not unsolicited criticisms are to be printed. So a partial victory for freedom of discussion was won. The thin edge of the wedge of freedom from presidential veto was inserted.

But that wedge of freedom has still to be hammered in. The main body of news items and articles may still be chosen on the basis of a presidential prejudice. Also, the vote was not against administrative control as such. The administration itself appoints the three editorial writers. So the feeling of uneasiness is far from completely allayed, for the 1939 totalitarian pattern of administrative control over our denominational press is still in vogue at our national headquarters.

Prayer

Eternal spirit of the living God, who knowest the way into our inmost souls, where Thou canst bring peace to those who are troubled, light to those who are confused, courage to those who are afraid, once again we gather in this house of prayer to link our lives with Thine.

Help us to remember that when we have done our best we may leave the rest to Thee. Help us to realize that the great plan for this beautiful but shadowed world rests with Thee, but that the major responsibility is ours. Long before we came into the world Thou wert at work on the age-old purposes, using men and women like ourselves to further them; long after our brief moment of life is done Thou wilt be working still, patiently shaping the world nearer to thy heart's desire. Help us to be very conscious that Thou dost expect us to put our lives on the highest level we can attain and to resolutely keep them there, meeting life's varied problems with all the intelligence and courage we possess.

Teach us to be practical idealists with our eyes on the stars and our feet on the ground, never losing sight of the ideal but willing to work toward it with whatever instruments are at hand, however broken or imperfect they may be.

May Thy liberating spirit move through ths sluggish currents of our beings. Quicken our perceptions. Clarify our thinking. Stiffen our wills. Help us to live on a plane where petty discords and jealousies of self-regard find no place. Give us a closer walk with Thee. Amen.

(From the Winchester Commentator).

Morality without religion has no roots. It becomes a thing of custom, changeable, transient, and optional.—H. W. Beecher.

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